

I oppose any plan to reduce the restrictions on Radio and Television ownership. In fact, I encourage the FCC to adopt and enact new rules that are as stringent as current law would allow. Since the 1996 telecom act, we have seen an extraordinary consolidation of media power--most notably in radio, where Clear Channel and a few companies wield enormous power.

Large consolidations of media power allow for abuse of that power. Artists cannot speak out regarding certain public policy out of fear that their music will no longer be played on the airwaves.

But most importantly is the potential affect on viewpoint diversity. When one or two owners control most of the airwaves (which are public), the viewpoint of that company gets a disproportionately strong voice.

While some commentators mistakenly suggest that when one station controls all of the media outlets there will be more "programming diversity" this ignores the real importance of diversity in media. Given the unique role of media in this nation and the media's unique constitutional protections and historical obligations, the importance of programming diversity pales in comparison to the importance of viewpoint diversity. Allowing radical political speech to have a niche is critical to ensuring the ultimate survival of our democracy. And while few radio outlets engage in such radical political speech these days (except a few right-wing commentators), this is a product of the dramatic consolidation that has already happened.

In Minneapolis, we have already felt the negative impact of media consolidation. Expanded ownership rules allowed Disney to purchase an independent rock-format station (Rev-105) that also aired left-wing political discourse. Now, the station plays a similar brand of music, but without the discourse. It is the political discourse that will keep this country smart and well-informed.

I can see no benefit to "the public interest" by allowing increased consolidation of media power in this country. I can, no doubt see plenty of financial benefit from media companies, and I no doubt see that financially healthy media companies are a good thing. But financial health is relative. A company's perceived health is a function of expectations and size. If they are simply not allowed to grow too large, then they can still earn profits on a smaller-scale.

This is not an issue of free markets. There is no "free market" in the airwaves, because the market is unnaturally impacted by a significant problem of scarcity--as countless supreme Court opinions have noted. In this world of scarcity, the public interest will be permanently damaged by allowing further consolidation of media.

Please abandon any plan to loosen any restriction on media ownership, and take the initiative to tighten the restrictions to the extent possible under current law.